

Purple

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Summary: Not all kryptonite is *bad*, but they all certainly have their side effects.

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A/N: Takes place in season 2, sometime after 'Individual Responsibility'.

A/N 2: This fic is an answer to the challenge by Queen of the Capes - *Somebody has taken a little stroll... or flight? ... while completely sound asleep. Who is it? Where do they go and what do they do? Who sees them? And what happens the next morning?*

Well, the story ballooned from there.

Part 1: Chimes

Clark smiled as he smelled his mom's apple pie cooling by the window.

The smell always brought back memories of his years as a boy, running through the fields playing before being called in for lunch or dinner.

Now, he was visiting his parents for the weekend, and while life in Metropolis was going well, it was always nice to take a little break, especially when it included pie.

"Clark, how was Main Street?" Martha asked as Clark entered the kitchen behind Jonathan.

"Good. I picked up another tie. See?" he said, showing off a colorfully patterned tie that would join his already extensive collection.

"That's nice, honey," she said, amused but happy he was happy as the phone rang.

"Hello," Jonathan answered. "Oh, hi, Rachel! How are you? ... Good, good... . Why, yes he is!" He looked over at Clark. "Here he is," he said before handing the phone over to Clark.

"Hello?" Clark asked, a little confused.

"Hi, Clark. I heard that you were in town and was hoping I could ask for a favor?" Rachel asked, sounding rather serious.

"Sure, Rachel. What do you need?" he asked.

'Could you come down to the station? I need to show you something,' she said.

"Certainly," he assured. "Shall I come now?"

'Please.'

"Alright. I'll be there in ten or so minutes," he said.

'Thank you. See you in a bit,' she said before hanging up.

"That was odd," Clark commented. "Do you know why Rachel might want to see me? She seemed a little antsy."

"No idea," Jonathan said, curious as well.

"Well, I suppose I'll see," he said, before heading out.

He got to the police station after parking his father's truck in the nearby lot. It was just after 4:30 p.m., so the workday was winding down as people began to head home for dinner. Entering the precinct, he spotted Rachel behind the front desk and waved at her as soon as she looked up at him.

She smiled back, but she looked more relieved than anything else.

"So what's this about?" he asked.

"This way. It's in my office," she said, all business.

He followed her, a bit at a loss. He nodded at the few officers they passed, all of whom he had known all of his life. They seemed a little confused but happy he was there, although they didn't attempt to start any conversation with him. Likely because of the expression on Rachel's face.

Going down the hall, he was suddenly aware of a soft, almost musical tune. It was weak, but he was struck by how strange it was to hear something like that within a police station. It reminded him of chimes.

"When I heard you were in town, I realized there is no one I would want to trust with this more than you, and considering what happened last time, there's no way I'm going to bring in any outside help with this," she said as they entered her office.

She closed the door.

"Er, okay?" he asked.

"I'm sorry, but I think it's better if I just show you," she said, going behind her desk and pulling out a wad of cloth.

The chimes became a little louder.

She placed the wrapped item on her desk and opened it.

He all but leapt out of his skin.

"What the — ?!" Clark gasped as the sound of chimes intensified, but he was more concerned with what he was seeing.

The crystal was no doubt a form of kryptonite, but instead of green or red, it was purple and shined with a glow that pulsed in time with the chimes he was hearing.

What was this?

Was he okay?

"Clark?" she asked, concerned.

"Oh, sorry. It just surprised me," he said, not taking his eyes off it as he cautiously approached.

He silently took stock of himself.

Was he feeling any differently?

Hurt anywhere?

Did he have any sensation that was not normal?

Other than the sound, everything seemed fine.

"Yeah, it surprised me too when Wayne brought it to me," she said.

"He found more?" he asked, alarmed.

"This is all he found. It was near where he had found the green rocks. Kryptonite, I mean," she said, before frowning. "There's a green kind and a red kind, right?" she asked. "Both dangerous to Superman."

He nodded, inwardly wincing at the reminder that his weakness was now known to the world. The incident with Metallo blew the existence of green kryptonite out in the open, and a few months after that, the existence of red kryptonite was ruthlessly revealed. Thankfully, the mental effects of the red kryptonite seemed to be manageable now,

so if he were to be exposed again, he wouldn't make a fool of himself.

"Well, all the more reason to give it to you. If red and green are bad, I imagine purple is bad for him too," she said, wrapping it back up.

"Uh, Rachel, just for future reference, if you encounter any more kryptonite, it'd probably be best if you store it in a lead box. Although, uh, we don't respond to it like Superman, it is still radioactive. We don't know if long-term exposure has any side effects. Also, please take any more you find to my dad. He'll be able to call me, and I'll take it from there," Clark said, thinking fast.

"Okay. Thanks, Clark. I knew bringing this to you was the right answer," she said, grateful as she picked up the wrapped shard. "Do you want me to find a box first?" she asked.

"Uh, no thanks. I think I can take it," he said before he could stop himself.

Thankfully, she didn't seem to find his words strange as she held it out.

He gingerly took the wrapped shard from her, even as the sound of the chimes became clearer.

It was actually rather pleasant. And it almost sounded ... familiar.

He smiled at her as he put it in his pocket before she walked him to his dad's truck.

"Thanks again, Clark. That thing has really been weighing heavily on my mind," she said.

"No problem, Rachel. And thanks for keeping it safe. I'm sure Superman will be happy to know this won't be falling into the wrong hands," he said.

She nodded gratefully and waved as he pulled out.

Driving down the road, Clark took the cloth-covered rock from his pocket and put it on the seat beside him.

The chimes were still there, but they seemed to be more background noise than anything else now.

He wasn't sure what to feel. He still felt uneasy and, if he was honest with himself, afraid. But other than the sound of chimes, he couldn't detect anything wrong.

"Dad, Mom!" he called as soon as he had parked in the driveway.

His parents ran outside, no doubt hearing his uncertain and worried tone.

"What is it, Clark?" his dad asked as he got out of the truck.

"Rachel got ... well, Wayne found some more kryptonite, but it's different. It's in the truck."

"What?! Get inside the house!" Martha cried, rushing over to the passenger's side of the truck where he had pointed.

"I think it might be okay. It doesn't hurt," Clark countered, even as he headed into the house.

"Neither does the red, but it still causes you problems!" Martha returned.

"I'll get one of the boxes," his dad said, running off to the barn.

Fifteen minutes later, the three of them huddled around the kitchen table, staring at the small lead box Jonathan had procured - purple shard within.

"I can't hear the chimes anymore," Clark said softly.

"The chimes?" Jonathan asked, worried. The two older Kents hadn't heard anything.

"When I was close to it, I heard something that sounded like wind chimes, but it was more musical. Almost like a lullaby," he said, frowning. "It sounded ... well, I think it sounded familiar, like I should know what it was."

"Are you sure you feel okay, though?" Martha asked.

"I think so. I just feel confused about what exactly I was hearing and why. This is definitely a type of kryptonite, but it's not like the green or the red."

"Well, it's better to be safe. I don't want you around it at all," Martha said. "The fact that you drove all the way here from town while sitting right next to it..."

"What should we do with it, though? What if I encounter it again?" Clark asked.

"As much as I'd like for you to just throw it into the sun, maybe learning more about it would be helpful. You've mentioned S.T.A.R. Labs before, and we know they have some of the green. Could they look into this one?" his father proposed hesitantly.

"Determine if it really is dangerous to me, you mean?" Clark asked, thinking.

"Yes."

Clark nodded. "Alright. Well, Dr. Klein tends to work late, I'll go ahead and drop it off now. I doubt he'll mind if I pop in."

Dr. Klein scanned the test results of the recent sample. Nodding to himself, he jotted down the figure on his spreadsheet as someone knocked on his lab door.

"Come in," he said absently.

"Dr. Klein?" asked a voice near the door.

He looked up. "Superman!"

"I'm sorry I didn't call in advance. If I need to come back later, I can," the Kryptonian said.

"No, no, it's no problem. Come in," Klein said quickly, excited to have an impromptu visit by the hero.

Superman closed the door behind him, and Klein noticed a small, metallic box in his right hand.

"So what can I do for you?" he asked.

"Well, I've actually come with something I'd like you to study for me, as well as keep safe until I decide what to do with it," Superman said, putting the box on the counter while adding, "Please don't open this while I'm here."

"Oh! I'll certainly do what I can. Do you know what it is?" he asked curiously.

"It's, well, purple kryptonite. Today is the first time I've encountered it."

"Encountered... You mean you were exposed?!" Klein asked, concerned. "Are you alright?"

"Yes, but other than hearing musical wind chimes, I had no reaction to it, as far as I can tell. No pain, no emotional change, nothing like the green or the red. However, the ... tune, I suppose you could say, did sound familiar to me, although I don't recall ever hearing anything like it before," Superman explained.

"Do you know if only you could hear these chimes?"

"Those who were with me told me they couldn't hear anything," he answered. "The other thing I noticed was that the glow from it isn't like the green or red, but pulses in

sync with the sound of the chimes.”

“Interesting. Well, thank you for trusting me with this. I’ll get started on it right away. Please let me know if you feel any differently. If there are any side effects, they may not be immediate. Do you mind telling me where it came from?”

“It was found near where the green kryptonite was found a little over a year ago,” he said. “And this was all there was in the area.”

“Alright, thank you, Superman. I’ll contact Clark Kent when I’ve found anything; is that alright?”

Superman nodded before giving his thanks and heading out.

Part 2: Sleepwalk

Clark didn’t immediately return to Smallville due to an emergency that needed his assistance. It was a building fire, but fortunately, he was able to put it out without too much trouble. One person had suffered some burns, and a handful of others had smoke inhalation, but considering the size and severity of the fire, it could have been much worse.

Tragedy averted, he flew over the city, taking a moment to enjoy the sunset that was beginning to drape across the horizon.

He loved watching sunrises and sunsets. The way the light and all the colors coalesced and seemed to pool in the distance. Vivid purple, pink, red, and orange. It was beautiful.

Before he could consider what he was doing, he had descended and had taken a seat on a bench in the park to watch it. His parents wouldn’t mind, and something about it was just so relaxing.

His thoughts began to drift.

He could hear children playing nearby and a few of their parents talking. Cars were driving and birds were chirping in the distance, but the colorful glow of the sun soon overtook it all.

O o O

Heather was a curious and bold little girl who loved to draw. She was now at the park with her mom because that was the deal: eat all of her broccoli and get to play at the park. Now she was especially glad that she had forced herself to eat the yucky baby trees. If she hadn’t, she would have missed seeing Superman!

He had landed without a word not long after they had arrived and had gone straight to the bench to simply gaze at the sunset. He didn’t seem to mind the reactions of awe and surprise by the people in the park, and Heather wondered what it felt like to be him.

Did he ever draw pictures? Was he good at drawing? He should be, since he’s Superman, right?

She picked up her chalk and got up and, before her mom could dissuade her, went to Superman.

“Superman?” she asked, brushing aside her brown curly hair.

She ignored how the whispers quieted.

Superman blinked and turned his head toward her.

“Hm?” he hummed.

“Would you like to help me with my picture?” she asked, holding out her yellow chalk.

He smiled and took the chalk. “Sure.”

She was ecstatic as she showed him what she had done so far. Her horse was a little crooked, but she thought it was better than the last one she had drawn. It was certainly better than Alice’s at school.

“Uh, you can draw the sun and the sky,” she prompted.

She beamed when he nodded and got down on his knees to draw a yellow shape beside her horse, copying the placement of the sun in real life. He then took the other colors and expertly blended them to make a perfect sunset on the two-dimensional horizon behind the horse, never minding the chalk getting on his hands and knees.

“Wow!” she said. “Thanks!”

“You’re welcome,” Superman said before looking back at the drawing.

He picked up the dark blue chalk and floated himself over a bit, while still kneeling, to a clear spot on the sidewalk. He looked over at the real setting sun before focusing back on the chalk. Suddenly, his hand blurred, and Heather stared in bewilderment at what appeared as he finished.

Shapes and what she assumed were letters took up a whole sidewalk square. Triangles with lines and dots were intermingled with curves and rectangles. It was all very neat and appeared to be written on straight, invisible lines.

“What’s that?” she asked.

“Solar influx,” he stated before frowning.

He quickly added a few more squiggles and shapes before leaning back to look at the whole thing. Apparently pleased with it, he handed her chalk back and stood up.

“Thank you,” he said. “I’m going to go eat some pie now. Bye.”

Heather smiled and waved before he launched himself into the air. A sonic boom soon followed as Heather’s mom and a few other adults slowly approached and blinked down at what Superman had written.

O o O

The sound of chimes echoed around him, and he felt peace.

He was wrapped in a soft cloth and felt a gentle hand brushing across his forehead as he was rocked back and forth.

A woman hummed close above him, and a soft blue light ebbed through the room.

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Spinning lights twirled above him as two voices spoke behind him. They were earnest and grim, but too far away to be understood. It was only their tone he could grasp, but that was enough.

Something was wrong.

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Other images followed, but they went by too quickly and were too foreign to comprehend. Shapes and whirling gleams of light, punctuated by a soothing male voice... .

Clark made his way downstairs and to the kitchen. His mom was already fixing breakfast, and he could hear the morning news on the television.

“Two eggs?” his mom asked.

“Sure. Thanks, Mom,” he said as he fixed himself some coffee.

“Sleep alright?” she asked.

“Yeah, had some weird dreams though,” he said, scooping some sugar into his mug.

“Oh, what did you dream?” his mom asked.

“About weird shapes and lights, and for part of the dream, I was Superman, helping a little girl with a chalk picture. I then drew some strange letters and numbers before telling her I was going to get some pie,” he said.

“That is odd,” Martha agreed.

‘Superman just flew down and sat on that bench. He seemed to be thinking hard about something, but then he relaxed and just watched the sunset,’ said a woman’s voice from the television.

Clark moved over to see the screen, stopping beside his dad.

There was a reporter interviewing people at the city park. Beyond them was a line of people walking past a row of westward-facing benches. What was particularly strange was that they would pause to stare down curiously at the sidewalk before walking on.

‘And then?’ the reporter inquired.

‘My daughter asked him if he would like to help her draw. He smiled and said ‘sure’ as he took the chalk. He was so sweet getting down to her level, and he drew the sunset behind her horse, as you can see,’ the mother said.

The camera crew approached the line of people, and they parted to let them capture the childish but adorable drawing of a horse in front of a picture-perfect backdrop of a chalk drawn sunset.

‘After he was done, he then levitated himself there and did this,’ she said, still excited but a bit bewildered as she pointed to the square beside it.

‘Did he say what it was?’

‘My daughter said he said, ‘solar influx,’ but she might have misheard or mispronounced,’ the mother said.

‘And then he just left?’ the reporter asked.

‘Yeah, after telling Heather goodbye and that he was going to go have some pie,’ she answered, tickled by the thought of Superman eating pie for some reason.

‘Uh, Dad, I thought that was a dream,’ Clark stated, alarmed.

“What?”

“That,” he said, pointing at the bizarre writing on the sidewalk.

Martha joined them, just as bewildered.

“You mean you did this without ... what? How could you do this while thinking it was a dream? And why did you write this? Were you sleepwalking?” Martha asked.

“I don’t know. If I was, I don’t know how. After I dropped off the kryptonite, I took care of a fire, and then I headed home, or at least I thought I did. But ... I’m so confused,” Clark said, sagging uneasily against the wall beside him, still facing the television.

“It’ll be alright, son. We’ll figure this out,” his dad assured.

“What if I do something that scares people? What if I do something I normally wouldn’t do? What if I do something

and need to remember that I had done it?!” Clark asked, edging toward panic.

“Clark, if you are sleepwalking, people don’t tend to do much of anything beyond what they would normally do,” Martha explained, trying to calm him.

“I’m not human. What people tend to do might not be true for me. I mean, look at what I did,” he said, pointing at the image of the foreign-looking text they were displaying on the screen again. “I don’t even know what I wrote! I mean, what is that? Kryptonian?”

“It does look similar to the script that was on your ship,” his dad commented.

“What should I do? Should I see Dr. Klein?” Clark asked.

“Well, this is likely a side effect of the new kryptonite,” his mom said gently.

“But what can be done about it? How would knowing help?” Clark asked.

“Telling him can’t hurt, honey. As long as he’s trustworthy,” Martha said.

“He is, but what do I say? ‘Hey, doc. You told me to tell you if there were any delayed side effects; well, I think I might have sleepwalked yesterday and wrote down gibberish in a language I can’t read before telling a little girl I’m going to eat pie?’”

Martha and Jonathon both sighed.

“What do you want to do?” Jonathan asked gently.

“I don’t know. Maybe I should just wait? Maybe that was just a one-time thing?” Clark fidgeted.

“But what if it wasn’t?” Martha asked.

Clark sighed heavily. “I guess you’re right.”

Part 3: Slip

Clark was feeling pretty good. Nothing strange had happened, and after talking to Dr. Klein about his apparent ‘sleepwalking incident,’ he was fairly confident he had gotten over the effects of the crazy purple kryptonite.

Of course, Clark could have done without the scientist’s excited questions (apparently Dr. Klein was oblivious to his unease), but at least it seemed like the hiccup was over.

He spent the rest of the day with his parents, enjoying everything that came with Smallville and life on a farm. By the time evening had come, he was ready for bed and fell asleep soon after his head hit the pillow.

“Ready for bed, Martha?” Jonathan asked, now finished with the dishes. He had instructed Clark to leave the dishes to him, especially since Clark had cooked dinner for them.

“Yeah, just want to finish reading this chapter,” she said, flipping a page in a mystery she was going through.

“Alright, that’ll give me a chan — ” Jonathan paused as Clark came back into the kitchen. “Is something wrong, son?”

“The hexagon is the most efficient shape,” Clark stated, going to a cabinet and opening it up as he began humming.

“Clark?” Martha asked, flashing Jonathan a concerned look.

“I wonder who is singing. She has a very nice voice,” he muttered to himself. “Wish I understood what she was saying though.”

“Son?” Jonathan asked.

“Hm?” he asked.

“What are you hearing?” he asked carefully.

“A woman. She hums too. She makes very pretty shapes as well. But they’re a little too bright. The man makes them better. His voice is firmer though,” Clark said, even as he continued rummaging in the cabinets, searching.

“What are you looking for?” Martha asked.

“Diamonds.”

“Diamonds? Why?” Martha asked, confused.

“They focus light the best,” he stated.

“Are you going to build something?” Jonathan asked.

“I want to check something. Look at one. Do we have any diamonds?” he asked.

“If you promise not to hurt it, you can look at my wedding ring. It has one,” Martha proposed.

Clark beamed. “Okay! Thanks!”

Martha carefully took off her wedding ring, which she had not removed for over twenty years, and gave it to him.

Clark took it gently and brought it up to his face, less than an inch from his nose. He gasped.

“The man was right! Hexagons are everywhere! Look!” he said, holding the ring out to her. “You have to tilt it, but I can see it. A little crumpled, but the structure is there. Weird.”

“Okay,” she said, taking the ring back from him.

“Son, I think it’s time for bed. You have work tomorrow,” Jonathan interjected.

“Hm. It’s so tight. But I suppose it’s okay,” Clark commented. “Helps me sleep.”

“Tight?” Martha asked.

“Something around me. Not sure why the woman always does it.”

“Let’s get you to bed, son,” Jonathan said, placing his hand on Clark’s elbow.

“Love you, Dad, Mom,” he said as they led him to his room.

“Love you too. Now try to sleep. We’ll talk in the morning,” Martha said, adjusting the blankets for him.

He didn’t answer. He was out cold.

He was sitting at his parents’ kitchen table again. Work was in an hour, but that wasn’t a problem.

“What am I going to do?” Clark asked.

Martha and Jonathan didn’t know what to say, but he didn’t expect a response as he continued.

“Maybe I can leave sticky notes around the house before I go to bed? Tell myself to go back to sleep?” he asked.

“It’s worth a try,” Jonathan said. “You didn’t really push back when we took you back to bed.”

“I still can’t believe I’m sleepwalking,” he said while shaking his head. “What on earth is happening? It’s almost as if —” Clark’s eyes widened, realization dawning.

“They’re memories! They have to be!”

Martha gasped. “You’re remembering Jor-El and Lara?!”

“That’s the only thing that makes sense,” Clark said, dazed.

Jonathan squeezed his shoulder supportively.

“Maybe knowing what they are will help stop it,” Clark

said, suddenly hopeful.

“Do you want to stay here for the next few nights to be sure? Since getting to and from work isn’t a problem?” Martha asked.

“Maybe. Do you think I should update Dr. Klein?”

“I think that would be prudent. He might have some ideas that might help,” Martha said.

“I’ll have to try to talk to him after work. I don’t have time now,” Clark decided.

“Alright, son. Call if you need us,” Jonathan said.

“Sure thing, Dad.”

Lois prided herself on being fairly observant, so when Clark came into work that morning, she knew his weekend had not been as relaxing as he had hoped. He didn’t look sad, but he did look weary. She hoped everything was okay with his parents. She knew he had gone back to Smallville for the weekend, but that was all she knew.

Unfortunately, she wasn’t able to inquire about his weekend because Perry immediately gave them an assignment that required swift action.

There was a hostage situation at the First National Bank, so they needed to get there immediately.

And, as was par for the course, Clark had somehow gotten separated from her on the way there.

She wasn’t sure if she should be amused by the predictable event or annoyed. At least she wasn’t surprised.

A sonic boom sounded overhead, and she smiled, assured that the hostage situation would be over quickly now. And hey, maybe she’d be able to ask Superman about what he had written at the park. She knew the public was dying to know what that was about exactly. She hoped he’d tell her if she asked. She felt if he’d answer anyone, it would be her.

Approaching the press line, Lois saw that the SWAT team was prepped and ready to go. Superman landed beside the man who appeared to be the head of the operation.

Lois really wondered why criminals even bothered now with Superman around since the whole thing was over in less than thirty seconds.

After all the hostages were safe, Lois used her press pass to get beyond the police tape and spoke to a few of the officers she knew. It really was nice to have connections. Knowing Clark, he’d somehow get statements from the crowd, and they’d be able to write a nice cohesive article as soon as they got back to the Planet.

“Thanks, Superman,” the Captain said as Lois stopped at the outer edge of the little pow-wow. After briefly glancing at Lois, he refocused on Superman. “On the off chance, do you feel these men might have any connections to the group responsible for the robbery you stopped a few weeks ago?”

“I think they could be,” Superman said just as a ray of sunlight suddenly gleamed between the buildings behind the Captain and shined directly onto his face. He squinted briefly from the abrupt brightness before continuing. “Lah grilshin himolkahm tal ahmetziolan esho shekyugam. Bahgakimolt eeyezish.”

Lois and everyone within earshot froze and simply turned and stared, not sure what they had just heard, and by

the look on Superman's face, neither did he.

"Superman?" the Captain asked, bemused and a little concerned.

"Et timasha evet — " Superman frowned and closed his eyes for a few seconds before reopening them. With everyone still staring at him, he took a deep breath and shook his head. "Sorry, I slipped into speaking Kryptonian. But in answer to your question, yes, their equipment and the way they spoke to each other suggested they're part of the same group. Family operated potentially."

"Mafia?" the Captain asked, deciding to just ignore the odd lapse of ... whatever that was from Superman.

"Or something similar," Superman said.

"Okay, thanks again, Superman," the Captain said.

With a nod, Superman disappeared. Lois felt he left in a rush.

What on earth had just happened?

Superman had just spoken ... Kryptonian? She supposed it would make sense that English wasn't his first language, but she had never really thought about it before. How many languages did he know? Did he have to concentrate whenever he spoke something different from his mother tongue?

But that didn't seem right. In the twenty or so months she had known him, he had *never* 'slipped' before. Why had he now?

And though Superman had appeared to shrug the incident off, she was certain he had been surprised, if not outright alarmed by it.

Was he okay?

She shook herself and quickly got what she needed to write the article before flagging down a taxi. Hopefully Clark would meet her back at the Planet.

Clark returned to the Planet and forced himself to remain calm and act normal. He had no idea what had made him start speaking Kryptonian – a language that up to that point he had no clue how to speak at all. Well, he could speak it now, and while he wasn't suddenly fluent in it, he felt he could probably get by well enough if he was touring a country that spoke it.

He sighed, both heartened and disheartened.

He now knew his people's language.

But he had no one to speak it with.

He knew a dead language.

The hours dragged on, and he did his best to not make Lois worried. He felt he was doing a fair job, and he even told her about his weekend (sans purple kryptonite), but he shouldn't have assumed it would end there.

"You doing okay?" she asked as they were finishing a bit of research on the recent robberies.

"Yeah, just didn't sleep well last night," he said with a grimace.

"Hm, well, if you would like, I can finish up here and you can head home. Take a half day," she suggested.

Clark straightened in surprise. "Really, Lois?"

"Sure, we've already written a good article today and made a lot of progress for future articles," she said, unbothered.

"Thanks, Lois. I really could use some sleep," he said.

"But let me help you finish this at least."

She nodded, pleased, before growing serious. "Do you think Superman sleeps?"

"I think he does, though he probably doesn't need as much as we do," he said, a little confused by the change in topic. "Why?"

"At the bank this morning, he was talking with the police captain after the hostage situation was over," she said, trying to decide how to explain. "And he just started talking a different language by accident. He did a pretty good job shrugging it off when he returned to English, but I could tell he was pretty troubled that he had done that. So I'm wondering if he did it because he was tired. Although ... there was that thing he had written on the sidewalk this weekend. I don't know. Have you spoken to him recently?" she asked.

"No, but I'll let you know when I do."

"Thanks, Clark. I hope he's okay," she said.

"Me too," Clark said honestly.

Part 4: Odd

Superman entered S.T.A.R. Labs for the third time in less than a week and went straight to Dr. Klein's lab.

"Superman, come on in!" Klein said, seeing him before he could knock on the door frame. Klein grew nervous. "Has something else happened?"

"You could say that," he said as he closed the door behind himself.

"What happened?" Klein asked, as curious as he was concerned.

"We have a ... doctor-patient confidentiality, right?" Superman asked, suddenly hesitant.

"Absolutely," Klein immediately reassured.

"I had another ... bout of sleepwalking last night. And a few hours ago, I slipped into speaking Kryptonian instead of English, and let's just say that is even stranger than it already sounds," Superman said, sighing.

"How can it be stranger? Have you never spoken it before?" Klein asked.

Superman stared at him for a long moment, clearly trying to decide how much he could or should say.

"I don't want anyone knowing this," Superman stated.

"I take confidentiality very seriously, Superman. If you don't want anyone else to know, it will stay between us, and if you don't want me to know, that's perfectly fine. I know you haven't known me for very long," Klein said understandingly.

Superman slowly exhaled and spoke, knowing how much he would be revealing by answering. "Before today, I didn't know a single word of Kryptonian. Now I could probably get by speaking it like an immigrant."

"Can you show me?"

"Et shalhe Krypton," he said before he translated. "I am from Krypton."

Klein looked extremely honored.

"What?" Superman asked.

"I'm the first human to know a bit of Kryptonian, am I not?" Klein pointed out happily.

Superman blinked before giving a soft smile. Maybe he would eventually be able to talk to someone in Kryptonian.

"I suppose you are."

"Well, has anything else happened? Have you determined if there is a trigger? Are you aware when you are in the sleepwalking state, as in, can you make conscious decisions, or are you on autopilot?"

"Uh. A mixture, I suppose. It feels like I'm in a dream when it's happening, but I suppose I'm aware enough to make decisions – sort of."

"And a trigger?" Klein prompted.

"Not really, although maybe sunlight? The first one happened when I was watching a sunset, and I started speaking Kryptonian after a beam of sunlight shined into my eyes."

"Hmm. It is something to keep in mind at least," Klein said thoughtfully. "As for what started all of this, I have only just started my analysis, but I can tell you it is definitely a kind of kryptonite, although its crystalline structure is more rigid and orderly than the red and much more than the green."

"I don't have the equipment here yet that'll let me do any deep scans, but the radiation it gives off is very interesting. It's different – as we'd expect considering it doesn't affect you like the other two, but it's not constant, nor does it pulse like the green."

"It does seem to have a musical quality, like you described, which is extremely intriguing. I wonder if your senses are so sensitive that you have a degree of synesthesia."

"Synesthesia? Like hearing a color or feeling a word?" he asked, baffled.

"Yes, only you are hearing radiation. Granted, this is just a theory. I could be completely wrong, but this makes the most sense with what we know so far," he said.

Superman nodded. "Well, thank you for looking into this and helping me. I hope the sleepwalking is over now."

"Oh, here. If you need me, but the lab is closed, you can call or find me here. I don't care how late or early," he said, giving Superman his card with a handwritten address and home phone number on the back.

Superman stilled as he read the back. "Thank you, Dr. Klein. I appreciate this."

"It's my pleasure," he said happily.

Lois decided to treat herself; so a bit after Clark had headed home, she went out and grabbed something to eat.

Chocolate pastry in hand, she began walking down the street but suddenly noticed the people around her were looking up at something. She shifted her attention to where they were focusing and quickly found what, or rather who, everyone was staring at.

Superman was standing in midair, two or three stories up, gazing intently at something in the sky as his cape danced in the breeze.

Lois, being her typical bold and daring self, went closer and then called out to him.

"Hi, Superman! What are you doing?" she asked loudly.

Superman startled slightly, losing a foot of altitude before looking down at her.

"Oh, just floating," he answered.

To the bewilderment and excitement of those on the

streets, he came down and landed before Lois.

"But I suppose I can walk. Are you going back to the Planet?" he asked, stepping beside her.

"Walk?" she asked, confused.

"I could use a walk, I think," he said, before looking around and appearing to enjoy the bustling city, unbothered by the curious looks he was receiving.

"Oh, okay then," Lois said as they began walking to the Daily Planet side-by-side.

She glanced up at him as they crossed the street, which must have been quite the sight. Normally, people only saw glimpses of him shooting across the sky. Now, he was walking right along with them, even waiting for the light to turn green like everyone else.

"So, uh, how is your day going?" Lois asked.

"Oddly," Superman stated.

"Oddly? What does that mean?" Lois asked, stifling a chuckle at the rather obscure description.

"It's hard to explain," he said as they continued down the block, passing by several awestruck people.

Superman smiled and waved at them.

"I should walk more often," Superman said. "But flying is still better."

"You won't get any argument from me," Lois said with a smile.

Superman smiled back before taking a step onto thin air and suddenly walking on nothing.

"Is that really flying though? You're just walking on air," she said.

To her surprise, Superman laughed. "I suppose that's true."

He stopped moving his feet but continued going forward at her pace.

"And I suppose this is just gliding?" he asked, garnering some laughter from passersby.

She laughed as well, wondering how much stranger things could get. He had never been this talkative or playful before, but she liked it.

"You know, flying backwards is actually easier than you'd think. The trick is knowing where you're going," he said, dropping back down and resuming his steps as if he had never stopped. "Skipping is what's hard."

"Skipping?" she asked, now really bemused. "Is that skipping on the ground or in the air?"

"Both! And no, there will be no demonstrations," Superman clarified firmly.

"Don't worry. I'm not a fan of skipping either," Lois chuckled as they came to the entrance of the Daily Planet.

"Well, I suppose I'll continue walking," Superman said, still appearing oblivious to the reactions of the people around him.

"Or you could come inside. Perry would kill me if I didn't attempt to get an interview," Lois said hopefully.

"With who?" Superman asked, confused, which frankly confused her.

"You, of course!"

Superman looked down at himself, as if expecting to find himself wearing something else, but then he looked back up and shrugged.

"Alright," he said.

She frowned inwardly. Something was a little ... off with him. Outwardly, she smiled and led the way.

They entered the Planet, and she headed to her desk. Superman meandered over, looking a little bored if she were being honest. Lois glanced at her coworkers, who were excited to see Superman so close.

"Let's go to the conference room, Superman," she said, deciding that would be the best place. Fewer distractions.

"Superman! To what do we owe this pleasure?" Perry asked, intercepting them between the bullpen and the conference room.

"An interview, Perry," she answered.

Superman's gaze panned to the right, as if distracted by something unseen. Super hearing?

"I think it's happening again," Superman said plainly.

"What's happening again?" Lois asked, now a fair distance away from the rest of the Planet's employees, in part because of Perry's presence.

"I apologize now if I say or do anything odd. Do you prefer pies or brownies?" he asked.

"What?" she asked, shooting a baffled and slightly worried look at Perry.

"Why don't you conduct the interview in my office?" Perry proposed, his reporter instincts screaming at him to get Superman out of view as soon as possible. Lois looked grateful.

"Sure," Superman said, following him and moving away from the curious eyes of the other reporters in the bullpen.

Perry closed the door, and thankfully, the blinds were already closed.

"Are you okay, Superman?" Lois asked after a moment.

"Uh ... not sure," he frowned. "Am I sleepwalking? This feels really weird. Hard to focus."

"Do you know what's happening to him, Lois?" Perry asked.

"No, but I think it started that day at the park. When he drew with the chalk," Lois theorized.

"Horses." Superman frowned. "Krypton had H'Raka, but those were more like mutated dragons. Horses are prettier, but they can't fly."

"Superman, let's sit down and try to figure this out because it's clear something is going on," Perry said, motioning to the plaid couch.

Superman immediately sat on the middle of the couch and sighed in relief. "Okay."

"So you mentioned this has happened before?" Perry asked, taking a seat by his desk while Lois sat in the chair closest to the couch. "You feeling this way, I mean."

"Yeah, but it was worse. Only afterwards did I know it was real. Sleepwalked," Superman answered. "At least now I know it's happening. I think anyway."

Lois' eyes widened in alarm.

"Do you know what's causing this?" Lois asked.

"Purple. Purple chimes. No. I mean kryptonite, but it's purple. It made me hear chimes." He rubbed his forehead as if he had a headache.

"Kryptonite?! When were you exposed? How bad was it?" Lois asked quickly.

"Not bad. Sort of good. I'm remembering Krypton." He

smiled softly.

"Remembering?" Lois asked, noting he didn't seem with it enough to answer more than one question in a row.

"Forgotten memories and things I never knew. Write. I need to write," he stated, growing abrupt.

Perry quickly grabbed a pen and notepad off his desk and offered them to him. "Here."

"Thanks," he said, taking the pen and jotting things down too quickly for them to see before he went to the next page, and then the next and the next.

Perry and Lois looked at each other as Superman became immersed in whatever he was doing.

"Malkagap trelits etal lo anidyugam," Superman muttered to himself.

"Superman?" Lois asked, concerned.

He put the pad and pen aside and slumped – slumped – back against the couch, closing his eyes. Before Lois and Perry could believe what they were seeing, Superman was fast asleep.

"What do we do?" Lois whispered.

"Let him sleep. It's clear whatever is happening is taking a lot out of him," Perry surmised.

"Should we call a doctor?" Lois asked.

"Do you think they could help?" Perry asked grimly.

"Good point," she sighed as she took the notepad and looked at it. "Whoa."

She turned it around and showed Perry.

"It's more of the writing he did at the park, although this portion looks like a diagram of something," he said, before flipping through the pages.

"What's that?" Lois asked.

The page was a well-drawn sketch of something pill-shaped with a hinged door and other features, each with a line connected to a word they could not read.

"Looks like a ... spaceship," Perry said.

"For one person?" Lois wondered aloud before they turned to the last page, which revealed a front view of what had to be the same vessel.

It was drawn with the hatch door closed, but what immediately had their attention was the crest at the nose of the craft. It was Superman's emblem.

"Do you think ... ?" Perry asked.

"Must be the ship he came here in," she whispered reverently, sliding her fingers over it.

They looked back at Superman, who was still sound asleep, and they were both struck by the surrealness of the moment.

"Do we just leave him to sleep?" Lois asked.

"I think we should, but let's make him more comfortable," he said, getting up. "Don't bother removing his boots. They seem clean enough anyway," he said as he eased Superman's head and shoulders down to the arm of the couch. Lois got his legs, a little surprised by how heavy they were.

After a little struggle, they successfully repositioned him flat on the couch.

"People are going to expect an article of some sort after this," Lois warned.

"We can hold off a bit," Perry assured. "There's plenty of excuses I can tell the people upstairs if they push, though

I doubt it'll be an issue. In the meantime, I'll stay here with him."

Lois hesitated, not wanting to leave just yet, but then she stood up. "I'll check back in an hour."

Perry nodded, and she left quickly, thankful, not for the first time, that the couch was out of view from the door.

Part 5: Origins

Perry looked at the time. It had been nearly two hours, and Superman was still sleeping.

He wasn't sure what he had been expecting, but every time he looked up from his work, he had to stop himself from staring at the red and blue form lying across his couch like a limp ragdoll.

The Kryptonian had barely moved at all and only released a few deep sighs between silent breaths since, unsurprisingly, he didn't snore. (Snoring is inefficient and thus is not super, apparently.)

Perry looked back down at the copy he was editing, but a sound from the couch caused him to look back up.

Superman was sitting up with his legs still on the couch. "What?" Superman asked, clearly confused as he looked around and then he stilled. "Oh."

"Superman?" Perry asked. "Are you ... feeling better?"

Superman quickly put his feet down on the floor and faced Perry.

"Yes, much better." He glanced down at the couch before looking back up. "Thank you for letting me rest here. How long have I been asleep?"

"About two hours. How much do you remember?"

"Enough to be grateful you brought me in here. Things are going to be bad enough with what's been happening. I would really prefer the public not know about any more nonsensical comments I've made while essentially asleep."

Perry nodded in understanding, but before he could comment, Lois knocked and quickly entered.

"Oh!" she said after quickly closing the door. "You're awake." She looked relieved. "How do you feel?"

"Much more awake," he said, smiling softly. "And thank you. I hope I didn't worry you too much, or scare you."

"Well, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't worried, but you'd have to do a lot more than what you did and said to scare me," Lois said, displaying all of her bravado in the hopes of reassuring him.

It seemed to work as he gave a sigh of relief and slowly stood up before spotting the notepad that was resting on the corner of Perry's desk.

"You can take the whole pad. I have plenty," Perry said, waving it away.

"Thanks," Superman said, looking contemplative and forlorn as his eyes fell to the foreign script on the notepad.

"What's wrong?" Lois asked.

"To my knowledge, I am the only survivor of Krypton," he answered after a moment.

Perry tried not to look too stunned, but the blunt information was startling, disturbing even.

"The only one to make it to Earth?" Perry asked, seeking clarification. But part of him quickly wished he hadn't asked.

"No. The only one to leave orbit before the planet was destroyed," he stated.

"What happened?" Lois asked softly.

Perry suddenly realized Lois was learning this for the first time as well.

"I don't know the specifics, but the planet's core was unstable. There were earthquakes and such, before it eventually exploded. My parents only had enough time to make one vessel, and for reasons I can't understand, they seemed to be the only ones who knew the end was coming soon enough to do something about it."

Superman frowned, his eyes glazing over. "Father was furious he was being ignored. He told my mother the Council had doomed them all."

"Who were your parents?" Lois asked.

"Jor-El and Lara of the House of El. They were scientists, or at least my father was. My mother assisted him, especially in the end."

"Did you help too?" Lois asked.

"I was too little," he said simply before moving on. "Krypton was more technologically advanced than Earth. Unfortunately, I think it's fair to say they had grown complacent and arrogant because of their successes. They had become overconfident."

"I can imagine having super abilities and advanced technology would make it difficult to remain cautious," Perry commented.

"No one had super powers on Krypton because Krypton's sun was red instead of yellow. Kryptonians there were pretty much like humans are here," Superman gently corrected.

"So you only have powers here because of our sun?" Lois asked, amazed.

"Yes. Anyway, the reason I'm telling you this is because I've begun to remember more about my people, and I want my people's language and culture to be remembered, at least to some degree."

"We could write an article to that effect, certainly. And I can get in contact with some universities if you wish to share any materials, like Kryptonian writings or the like, to get the ball rolling there."

Superman was clearly touched by Perry's swift offer of assistance. "Thank you."

"It's the least I can do, Superman. You've saved my life and the lives of everyone on Earth at least once. I know you don't do what you do to earn favors from us, but don't be afraid to ask for things. I know many of us would be thrilled to help you," Perry said.

Superman smiled gratefully.

"So what are we going to do about what's been happening to you?" Lois asked. "I mean, has it been getting better? Is there anything we can do to help you? Do you have a place to stay?"

Superman blinked at her barrage of questions, but before he could try to begin answering, she continued.

"Do you live alone? Although if you do, I don't think it's a good idea for you to be alone right now. Even though you seem to be sort of aware of what's happening when it happens, you're still out of it – no offense," she said, her cheeks growing pink as she realized she was babbling.

“She does make a few good points, Superman. I would offer my house for tonight or for however long you need, but my wife’s sister is in town, and I wouldn’t put you through that,” Perry said before looking at Lois.

“You can stay with me,” Lois said, trying not to sound too eager. “Although, if you don’t feel comfortable, I’m sure Clark would be willing to help you – however, he went home early today due to not feeling well.”

Superman thought for a moment, looking torn. Finally, he made a decision.

“I can stay with you tonight. I wouldn’t want to bother Clark if he’s under the weather, especially when I might not be a sane houseguest,” Superman said, actually poking fun at himself – which surprised Perry.

“Alright,” Lois said happily. “I can drive us, unless you would rather fly?”

“It would probably be easier if I just flew us,” Superman said simply.

“So you’ll be sticking with either Lois or me until this is over, and we can just say it’s for the article we’re doing on your people, which isn’t untrue,” Perry said, nodding.

“And if there’s an emergency?” Superman asked.

“Then you can take Lois, and, if need be, she can run interference if anything happens,” Perry said before growing serious. “We might have to inform the public about what’s going on with you. There is a fair amount of curiosity over what happened at the park as well as your language slip at the bank. I think we can go about it in a way to avoid a panic, but you should prepare yourself.”

Superman nodded in understanding, resigned to the likely event.

“Okay, so we have a plan,” Perry said.

Lois nodded, trying to play it cool but Perry saw through that.

She was ecstatic to have Superman over.

Lois tried to keep her heart from hammering, but as they went up to the roof of the Planet, it was impossible.

It was after six, and they were able to avoid attracting attention from her coworkers because most of them were already gone for the day.

“Are you okay?” Superman asked.

“Huh? Oh, yeah, I’m fine. Why?” Lois asked.

“Your heart is beating like crazy,” Superman said as they made it to the roof.

“Oh, I just realized I don’t have anything in my fridge,” Lois said, mostly honest. “I mean, it’s dinner time, and I just realized I have nothing to feed us.”

“What do you normally eat?” Superman asked.

“I normally do takeout. I, uh, am not great at cooking,” she admitted.

“We can do that, and I don’t really need to eat so don’t worry about me,” he said.

“No, no, it’s no problem. I was just being silly,” Lois assured.

“Alright,” he said, stepping beside her. “Ready to go?”

“Yeah,” she said.

They flew quickly to her apartment, and she was grateful that she had taken to leaving her window unlocked.

“I’ll go ahead and call for takeout,” she said, quickly

going to the phone as he closed the window behind him. “Is there anything you wouldn’t like?”

“I’m fine with whatever,” Superman said, approaching her couch. “I’ll, uh, just sit down.”

Lois couldn’t help but smile to herself as she watched Superman shift uncertainly on her couch while she ordered some pizza and a two-liter bottle of cream soda.

“So what would you like to do?” Lois asked. “I have board games, we could watch TV, a movie.” She shrugged. “I mean, we have a few hours before I typically go to bed. I don’t know what your normal schedule is, so... .”

“We could watch TV. What’s usually on at this time?” he asked.

She smiled and turned on the television. Fortunately, they didn’t need to channel surf for long when they came upon ‘Star Trek: the Next Generation’. Superman’s eyes seemed to flash with interest, and she liked the show herself, so with an agreeable nod from him, she put the remote control down.

“I must admit, I like this Star Trek better than the original,” she said.

“Me too,” he agreed. “Picard is a better Captain.”

“You watch television?” she asked curiously.

“Not a whole lot, but occasionally. Interestingly, TV shows have helped me out on a few rescues,” he said as the theme song ended and commercials started.

“How?” she asked.

“Cultural references for one, but the most important clip I saw was actually from ‘Rescue 911,’ where I learned children sometimes hide when the building they’re in is on fire. They get scared because of the smoke and all of that and hide under beds and in closets. Knowing that has... . Well, I’ve been able to find kids faster than I would otherwise.”

Lois blinked, suddenly realizing there was a lot more to being Superman than she had imagined.

“How hard is it to find people in fires?” she asked.

“Depends on the fire. I can usually just blow out the fire and the smoke, and then from there, it’s easy, but if the building is in danger of collapsing, it’s difficult.

“I can’t rely on my hearing; the fire is just too loud. By the time I could triangulate the location of a heartbeat, smoke inhalation can do some serious damage, not to mention the flames. X-ray vision is a bit more helpful, so I of course use that when I do an initial scan of a building, but I can’t really move while I’m peering through walls and things. If I move faster than a slow walk, my vision gets all distorted and blurry, and if I do it while moving at super-speed, I get dizzy and nauseous. So I’ve learned to do the scan and to listen when I first come to a scene. It usually takes me about ten to thirty seconds, depending on the structure, and that shows me if I can blow out the fire or not and helps me determine how many people are inside and where they are. Of course, if they’re moving around or running to hide like some children do, that’s when my speed comes in to find them. I usually work from the top down, unless I see someone who needs me immediately.”

Lois blinked. “Wow. I’ve never really thought about there being a process to saving people.”

“I’ve improved it over time, and knowing that kids hide

in fires has helped a lot. I couldn't tell you how many times I've found toddlers hiding under clothes deep in the corners of closets, or even under stuffed animals in toy chests." He exhaled slowly as the commercials ended and Captain Picard came on the screen.

"Would you mind if I included what you just told me in an article?" she asked after a moment.

"Please do. The more people who know to teach their kids not to hide in fires, the better. It'll help me and will help firemen everywhere."

Lois nodded as they got into the show.

"Do you think we'll ever explore like they do in Star Trek?" Lois asked at the next commercial break.

"I think it's possible, but it'll be a long time from now."

"Did your people know of any other civilizations?" Lois asked.

"My father mentioned sending probes to hundreds of worlds, and that he chose Earth because the people looked Kryptonian and had similar ethics, so I can only assume that means there were other places that were different," he answered before a knock interrupted him.

Lois quickly got up and brought back the pizza and soda.

"I'll grab us plates and glasses real quick," Lois said, setting what she had down on the coffee table as Superman stood up, not sure how to help. "Don't worry, you're a guest. Just sit and enjoy yourself."

Superman sat back down, and before too long they were eating pizza and enjoying the show.

"My favorite character has got to be Data," Superman said after a moment. "Though Geordie is a close second."

"Oh? Why?" Lois asked.

"In most any other place, they'd be complete outsiders, but there, they're welcomed and gladly use their differences to the benefit of others."

"Like you," Lois grinned as the credits started.

Superman shrugged self consciously before Lois glanced at the clock. It was seven o'clock.

"Well, I have a few movies, or we could try some games. Unless you want to find another show?" Lois proposed.

"A game is fine. What do you have?" he asked.

"Scrabble, cards, uh, Monopoly," she said, getting up and going to a cabinet. "What card games do you know?"

"Well, I played poker most recently, but I also know go fish, speed, kings around the corner, rummy, slapjack, and 52 pickup."

Lois blinked. There was a lot she wanted to dig into there. She took the cards from the shelf and returned to the table.

"Poker? I'm sorry, I'm trying to imagine you at a table with money on the line," Lois said, amused.

"Well, I ended up losing the money that was on the line actually," Superman admitted with a half smile.

"So you do refuse to cheat," she said, pleased with herself while privately wondering who he had played with—but she felt it wasn't quite appropriate to ask that.

"Huh?"

"It was something one of my coworkers said a long time ago while we were playing poker. They suggested you

could just look through the cards and make the appropriate bets, but then someone else said you would never do that because that goes against who you are," she explained.

"Oh."

Lois began shuffling the cards as she asked, "Is 52 pickup what I think it is?"

"Yeah, a practical joke parents tend to pull on their unsuspecting kids," he said as Lois paused in her shuffling, shaking her head.

"I don't think speed or slapjack would be fair," she commented. "I also don't want to risk my table breaking, no offense."

"Fair enough," he said, smirking. "Go fish is fine. I don't have much money on me for poker."

"So you do carry money?" she asked, surprised.

"Never know when it'll be helpful," he said evasively.

"I see. So why did you settle in Metropolis?" Lois asked as she began dishing out the cards. "I don't think I've ever asked you."

"The variety of people, primarily. There's plenty of opportunity here as well," he said, looking at his cards. "And it's a place I know I can be useful."

"You travel the world a lot though. Are there other places you think you could have settled instead?" she asked, her reporter senses tingling. "You go first."

"Well sure," he said, before asking, "Do you have any fives?"

She sighed and handed over a five of hearts while still waiting for him to elaborate on his answer. He obliged.

"After my first rescue in the city, it just felt right. And then after the reception, your article, I didn't have to worry about how people would react to me as much as I had feared. I owe a lot to y —"

He tilted his head and his eyes panned to the right.

She grew concerned, wondering if he was slipping into a dream state again.

"I, uh, there's a pile up on 70," he stated, instantly relieving her initial worry.

Part 6: Mother

"Oh! Let's go!" She jumped up, grateful she had kept her shoes on. "Come on, I can't let you go alone considering what could happen!" she continued, exasperated by his baffled look.

"Right. I'll just drop you off beyond the road then," he said, going to the window. "I've got to move fast." He held out his hand, which she quickly took.

He held her close, and Lois had barely managed to take a breath when she felt them suddenly *move*.

The next second, she found herself on the side of the road about twenty feet away from the several-vehicle crash.

A box truck was on its side, partially crushing the front end of a car, while three other cars and another truck had struck each other behind them; one had twisted in the guard rail, no doubt from trying to avoid the truck. Several of the cars were smoking, as was the far truck.

She hurried forward, pausing briefly as she spotted Superman ripping off a door after blowing an engine fire out. She approached the nearest car, immediately finding a female driver who was shaken but seemed alright. She

gently helped the woman out and guided her to sit on the side of the road. Other people from stopped cars on the highway quickly got out and began to help as well. As awful as the situation was, it was actually quite inspiring to see so many people pull together to help.

A firetruck, ambulances, and police began to arrive as Superman continued to meticulously open up crushed cars so people could be safely removed. Soon after, the crowd pulled back, realizing they would be in the way rather than helpful if they remained involved now that emergency crews had come, especially since it was beginning to get dark. The sun had almost set.

Lois remained closer than the rest, grimly watching the extraction of the injured. Thankfully, there were no fatalities, but the number of backboards being brought out from the ambulances made it clear things were still serious. Through it all, Superman used his heat vision several times to cut through metal and crushed debris, carefully blowing cold breath on all the material soon after to prevent burns or fires.

Lois wasn't sure how much time had passed, but things seemed to be winding down. The most seriously injured were already on their way to the hospital, and a few more ambulances had arrived to help the rest.

Suddenly, there was a commotion at the truck at the opposite side of the pileup. Superman instantly disappeared and reappeared on that side.

"Everybody back! It's magnesium!" Superman shouted.

Fire suddenly rose up like a phantom over the truck, obstructing Lois' view of Superman.

He shot forward, and, for a split second, Lois wondered why he didn't just blow out the fire, but then she remembered a magnesium fire could only be put out chemically. His breath would cause water in the air to condense right onto it, thereby feeding the fire, and that was assuming the magnesium didn't blow into the air. What a scary thought! She wasn't sure about the exact chemistry of the reaction, but she knew magnesium and any form of water with it was bad, including humidity, and she remembered from somewhere that using a basic carbon dioxide fire extinguisher was also bad.

What was he going to do? What could he do?

He moved and, with his bare hands, grabbed the cracked container that had flames bursting from it before shooting straight up into the sky. Most everyone on the highway followed his progress up, which was surprisingly easy despite the darkening backdrop due to the white flashes intermingling with the flames lashing out from his grasp.

As soon as he was far enough above them, he tossed it up with a single powerful thrust. It looked like a shooting star going in reverse.

He remained hovering far above them all long after the shrinking glow finally disappeared. Several more seconds passed before a few officers below aimed their flashlights up onto his form, which was faintly bobbing up and down in the air. Why was he not coming back down?

"Superman?! Are you okay?" one of them called up to him.

Finally, he slowly began to descend after blowing on his hands. To the surprise of those watching, even though he

had his back to them, they saw steam rise and heard the crackle of ice and water vaporizing. He then shook out his hands and landed softly soon after, still keeping his back to them.

Lois ran to him, ignoring the startled looks from the officers.

"Superman?" she asked, stopping just behind him.

He took a deep, shuddering breath before clearing his throat and turning around.

"I just needed a moment," he stated, putting on a brave face and smiling reassuringly at the officers and everyone who could see him on the road. "Is there anything else I can do to help?" he asked the officer who seemed to be in charge.

"No, no, we can take it from here, Superman. Thanks so much for your help," he said, still a little confused about what had happened. But if Superman said he had just needed a moment, who was he to argue?

Superman refocused his attention on Lois as an officer began to guide her back to the rest of the observing crowd.

"Shall we finish the interview, Ms. Lane?" he asked lightly, offering his hand.

"Please," she said, moving forward.

"Goodnight," he said to the gathered emergency personnel, before vanishing with Lois.

He slowed his flight halfway to her apartment, and Lois became aware of how deeply he was breathing, as if he was trying to keep control of himself.

"What happened?" she asked softly. She knew there was no point in asking if he was alright.

"I remembered my mother, Lara, holding me," he said as they flew over the clouds.

"Oh." Lois didn't know what else to say to that, so she just tightened her grip on him.

Neither spoke the rest of the way to her apartment. She felt he was grateful for the silence, so when he set her down and shut the window behind them, she decided to give him a bit more space.

"Would you like some tea or something to drink?" she asked.

Superman brushed his hand across his forehead before pulling it back and looking at it.

"Actually, would it be alright if I took a shower first?" he asked tentatively.

"Oh! Of course," she said. He didn't look all that dirty considering what he had been doing, but she could see some grime on his hands and sleeves. A shower was probably a good idea. "Uh, my bathroom is through there, and there're towels hanging up. Feel free to use whatever," she said.

"Thanks."

She watched him disappear into her bedroom, which was connected to the master bath. A minute later, she heard the water turn on, prompting her to go to her kitchen and start some tea.

At least him taking a shower would give her some time to decide how to go about things. It was clear whatever he had seen had impacted him a great deal, but she was unsure how to help. It also made her wonder more about his past.

How well did he remember his mother?
 How old was he when he left Krypton?
 How much had he forgotten about Krypton, and how much did he just never know to begin with?
 When had he arrived on Earth?
 Where did he grow up?
 She now highly doubted he had grown up on Krypton. But did that mean he had grown up on Earth?
 Her thoughts immediately halted as Superman returned. His hair was wet but his uniform was dry and much cleaner. He had been gone for less than two minutes!
 With a gentle smile to her, he went past the kitchen and sat down on the couch.
 Shrugging off the surrealness of witnessing how fast he could do things, she finished preparing the simple Lipton tea and brought it out with some sugar before sitting beside him.

“Do you want to talk about what you saw earlier?” Lois asked.

“Not sure what to say really,” he said quietly. “My mother was holding me while walking outside. It was night, and I saw the sky. There was a moon, but also a trail of smaller shapes that arched across the horizon, as if something big had crumbled in orbit a long time ago. We were on a balcony of some sort, overlooking a huge, glowing city of crystal.”

He closed his eyes, recalling the scene in his mind’s eye with striking clarity.
 The city sprawled below them shimmered in colors, standing out spectacularly beneath the night sky. Crystal structures stretched up high and branched over spans of slender walkways of metallic blue, giving the city the appearance of an immense tapestry. Chimes echoed in his mind, as if to whisper, ‘this was home’.

“It was called Kryptonopolis. It was where I was born.”
 “Sounds beautiful,” Lois said gently.
 “Yes,” he agreed, opening his eyes before taking a sip of his tea.

She watched him closely, her initial desire to ask him questions evaporating as she saw how tired and weary he had become. Admittedly, a lot had happened over the past day, even for him. Perhaps they should turn in.

She stood up abruptly, startling him.
 “Lois?” he asked, concerned.
 “Oh, it’s okay, I’m going to go ahead and get you a pillow and some blankets,” she said before pausing. “Are you okay sleeping on the couch like last time?” she asked, before babbling. “I mean, you can have my bed tonight, I don’t mind, or I can pull out the cot. I know the couch isn’t that comfortable. Though, does that matter to you?”

He hesitated before answering, no doubt weighing his answer. “The cot, please.”

“I knew my couch was uncomfortable, but wow. Is it really that bad?” she asked, curious.

Relieved he hadn’t insulted her, he relaxed and answered. “Although I haven’t ever woken up sore due to a bad mattress or whatever, my sense of touch ... I can feel all the imperfections of whatever I’m lying on or touching. It can make it a little hard to sleep sometimes. Granted, I can sleep while hovering, but that can come with its own

batch of problems.”

Lois smirked.
 “What?” he asked, noticing her amusement.
 “So you’re like Princess Pea. The Princess and the Pea, I mean,” she clarified.
 “The – oh, the fairy tale.” He smiled as well. “I suppose that’s a fair comparison, but I can still eventually fall asleep.”

She nodded, before frowning.
 “Why didn’t you tell me the couch was bad the last time you stayed here?” she asked, referring to the weekend when he had been blinded.

“There were more important things to be concerned about at the time,” he said, shrugging.

“I suppose that’s true,” she admitted, before becoming curious again. “So, sleep floating?”

“I do it probably once a week by accident. I’ve broken a few bed frames by falling when I wake up, but that hasn’t happened in a while. Your cot should be safe.”

She laughed. “Well, I’ll go ahead and get that cot.”
 Five minutes later, the cot was set up with a pillow and blanket. Lois also took out her spare toothbrush and toothpaste for him, which he used while she had set up his cot.

“Do you need another blanket?” Lois asked.
 “One is fine. Temperature doesn’t really bother me.”
 “But a lumpy mattress does,” Lois smirked.
 “And scratchy blankets,” he added.
 “Oh, I hate those!” Lois agreed. “My mom had me wear wool socks one time when it was cold out. They were torture!”

Superman shuddered, and Lois wasn’t sure if he was exaggerating or not as they shared a laugh.
 “Well, if you need anything, I’ll just be in my room after I put these away,” she said, gathering up their dishes and noting that the time on the clock behind him was 9:12 p.m.
 Yeah, it was late enough.

“Thanks,” Superman said, going to the cot at the side of the room, adjacent to the couch. He eased himself down.

She looked at him expectantly while finding the scene quite surreal. A bland tan cot with his colorful form seated on it.

“It’s fine. No lumps,” he assured with a smile.
 “Goodnight, Lois.”

“Goodnight,” she said, returning the smile before going to her room.

Clark smiled to himself as he heard Lois get ready for bed before he quietly sighed.

His parents would be worried. Likely already were. Maybe he should go to a payphone really fast? But what if Lois heard him leave or noticed him gone? Or worse, what if when he left, he fell into another sleepwalking spell and did something irreparable before he got back?

No. As much as he wanted to let his parents know he was alright, he couldn’t risk it. They would understand once they learned, and he would find a way to call them in the morning.

Nodding to himself, he quietly removed his red boots and parked them at the foot of the bed before lying down.

Thankfully, the curve of the cot was simple and smooth, providing balanced support far superior to the couch, and he fell asleep soon after.

The sound was exceedingly loud. Louder than a jet engine. And everything was shaking.

Where was he?

He was wrapped in something, but his arms and face were free.

What was happening?

Why couldn't he see anything? Why was it so dark?

But then the most terrifying question came.

Why was he alone?

Fear rose up like a furious dragon. Its jaws closed down onto his chest as he cried out. Unfortunately, his call for help was swallowed by the roar thrumming all around him.

Why was no one coming for him?

He had never been alone for so long before. He had never been so afraid.

And then a voice came forth, but instead of it coming from a direction, it seemed to be rooted in his mind.

"Kal-El," the loving voice said soothingly. "We love you so much. We love you. Mommy loves you. Please live. Please live, my son, and live well. We lo — "

And then the root was gone from his mind. Torn away by a distance further than any star.

*His birth mom's last words. Her last **thoughts**. They had been for him.*

She had loved him.

*Of course, he had known that already, but hearing it, **feeling** it, was something else entirely.*

And then the reality of what he had just experienced came crashing down upon him as his mother's voice, her final, loving words, echoed dimly in his mind.

The pain was immense and heavier than any space shuttle.

He wept.

And as he shed tears of loss and gratitude, he slowly became aware of arms around him.

Part 7: Headache

Lois stayed awake for a while reading. She just wasn't tired enough to actually try to sleep yet. She hoped whatever was going on with Superman would calm soon. It seemed to be. At least he hadn't gone into another deep sleepwalking state like he had experienced at the Planet.

After a few more pages, she finally closed the book and set it aside, falling asleep not long after...

At first, she wasn't sure what had woken her up. But then she heard it again.

It sounded like distant struggling and something she couldn't place. Did a neighbor have their TV on too loud? She looked at the clock. 2:43 a.m.

Really?

She sat up and listened carefully. If it was the neighbor across the way again, she'd be calling the police.

After a few seconds of listening, she froze.

The noise wasn't coming from outside her apartment, but from *inside*.

She climbed out of bed and put on her robe as the

sounds seemed to grow more frantic. And then she heard a shout. A wordless cry for help. A cry of fear.

Hurrying out of her room, she entered the living room, and her eyes instantly fell on Superman's form on the cot. His eyes were closed, but he definitely wasn't resting soundly.

"Superman?!" she cried.

His blanket was on the floor, and he was lying on his back, weakly fidgeting in his sleep. She instantly concluded he was having a nightmare. What else could it be?

"Superman, wake up! You're having a nightmare!" she said, kneeling beside the cot.

She took his hand as her knees pressed into the rug, and she shook his shoulder with her other hand.

He gasped, and his feeble struggles abruptly ceased. However, she knew he was still asleep because his expression suddenly fell into one of despair.

"Superman, Superman, come on, wake up," she urged. But then she could only stare in astonishment as he released a sob. "Hey, hey, it's alright. You're dreaming," she said as tears began seeping from the corners of his eyes.

She didn't know what to do, so she simply did what she always did. Let her instincts take over.

He began squirming again, but his movements were slow as she took hold of his shoulders and pulled up, slipping one of her hands behind the back of his neck. He didn't resist, but he didn't help either. She grunted as she got him to sit upright with his legs still stretched out along the cot. He slouched forward, which was just as well as she met him halfway, allowing him to come to rest against her. His arms were limp while hers tightened around his heavy frame, one beneath his cape. She held him firmly, feeling his tears fall upon her shoulder and the nape of her neck as he continued to weep.

What could he be dreaming? What would make Superman respond this way?

"It's alright," she continued, hoping he could hear her on some level and that he would wake soon.

After another minute, he grew quiet, and his breaths became less shuddered.

"It's okay," Lois said, before feeling his arms wrap around her.

He bent his head closer as he clung to her. He was so close that she could feel his breath on her neck and through her hair.

His breathing calmed, and were it not for his arms still around her, she would have thought he had fallen back asleep.

"Alright?" She had said that word an awful lot, she realized.

"Yes. Thank you," he said softly. His voice sounded strained, clearly not immune to emotion.

"Nightmare?" she asked.

"No. Memory," he said, still resting against her, although not as heavily.

She tightened her arms around him, causing him to release a shaky sigh.

"I was in my ship, well, module. But at the time, I didn't understand that. It was dark and loud. Everything was shaking. And I was alone. It was ... scary. I don't remember

ever being so scared before,” he said hesitantly.

“What was happening?” she asked.

“I was leaving Krypton ... and it was close. If they hadn’t sent me when they did... .”

“You mean... ?” She didn’t need to elaborate any further as he nodded.

“I heard my mother’s voice. During the launch. It was in my mind. I think my people were telepathic.”

“What did she say?” she whispered, her arms still around him.

“That — ” His voice cracked, and he had to stop. He cleared his throat and forced himself to continue. “She loved me... . She asked me to live. To live well. And then her voice was gone. I felt her go in my mind. Just as Krypton was destroyed.”

“I can’t imagine,” Lois said, not sure of what else to say.

“I knew they sent me here because they loved me. They didn’t want me to die with them, but hearing her say it is different, you know?” he continued, his voice wobbly.

“Yes,” she agreed with a squeeze.

Soon after, he returned the gentle hug before pulling back, a bit more composed.

“Shall we go to the kitchen?” she asked after a moment.

He nodded before floating them both up to their feet.

“Whoa,” she said, surprised.

“Sorry, did I scare you?” he asked, standing in front of her, tear tracks and all.

“No, you just surprised me. Is that usually how you get out of bed?” she asked.

“Not usually, but I’m not usually so close to the floor,” he said.

She nodded understandingly before leading the way to the kitchen.

She got out some cheese and crackers, one of the few things she had plenty of, and set the food between them before getting them both ice water. Considering they still might want to go back to sleep, fixing tea seemed counterproductive.

“Superman?” she asked, noticing how he seemed to be zoning out at the table.

“I don’t really feel Super at the moment. Please call me Kal-El,” he said, glancing up at her with a small smile. “It’s my birth name.”

Lois’ eyebrows shot up, suddenly wondering why she had never inquired about his name after the initial interview.

“Sorry. I should have told you that a long time ago, among other things,” he added softly, frowning at the end.

“It’s alright. You know, I probably should have asked before.”

“You did ask me, but at that time, I didn’t know what my birth name was,” he admitted.

“Did you find out tonight?” she asked.

“No, I found out a few months after you and, uh, Clark first encountered Bureau 39. From the globe,” he said, suddenly looking antsy.

“Oh.” She looked down at the cheese and took a thin square.

She looked back up, about to ask a question, when she found him pinching the bridge of his nose.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, concerned.

He put his hand down and looked up at her.

“Just a headache,” he said.

“You get headaches?” she asked. She wasn’t sure why she felt that was so weird, but she did.

“It usually takes kryptonite or a lunatic with a sound weapon, but yeah,” he said good-naturedly. “I suppose with everything going on, it makes sense I’d get one now.”

“Would you like some Advil or something?” she asked, moving to get up.

“Pain medications don’t do anything for me, unfortunately,” he said, quickly motioning her to stay seated. “I’ll be alright. Anyway, I actually want to tell you something.”

She shifted forward in her chair, wondering if it involved something he had seen in his memory. “Okay, what is it?”

“The truth. Well, the whole truth. You certainly deserve to know, and it’s something I’ve been trying to figure out how to share with you for a while, but it’s... . Well, I’ve never told anyone before, and it’s... .” He trailed off, unable to find the words.

“Whatever it is, you can tell me, Su — Kal-El,” she assured.

If she wasn’t already wide awake, she would be now!

Superman was going to tell her something he hadn’t told anyone before?!

“Before I start, I want you to know that I didn’t like keeping this from you, well, really lying to you, but at first I didn’t know you. I didn’t know I could trust you, and this isn’t just my secret, but my parents’. Well, my adopted parents.”

Lois’ jaw dropped open slightly, but before she could voice any questions, he continued.

“But then after I got to know you, it became complicated, and I realized I couldn’t just tell you without likely hurting you. And the longer I’ve waited, the harder it’s become. I don’t want to hurt you, but I also know I’m hurting you by not telling you.” He frowned and took a drink of water.

“Okay,” she said. “Once you’ve told me whatever you’ve been hiding, I’ll try to keep what you’ve said in mind.”

He smiled gratefully at her as he put his glass back down.

“I left Krypton when I was less than three months old,” he said. “I grew up on Earth. I even went to school with other kids, but I knew I was different pretty early on. I never got hurt or ill, and when I was five or so, my first abilities began to show,” he said, before taking a moment to eat a cracker.

“Grew up here... .” Lois whispered, quickly realizing the implications.

That must mean he had another name. A human name, a human life! It meant he had been on Earth among them for as long as he could remember! No wonder he knew their languages so well, not to mention their culture. She couldn’t believe she had never seriously thought about it before. He was one of them!

She forced herself to be patient and quiet. Obviously,

this was really hard for him. She should at least allow him to tell her at his own pace instead of spouting off questions, no matter how much she wanted to.

“Yes. I grew up here, but I knew I had to hide what I could do, especially since I didn’t know what I was. My parents were afraid I would be taken away if anyone found out that I wasn’t . . . normal.”

She gasped, horrified by the thought of anyone growing up like that, let alone Superman.

“My parents told me they found me in a crashed vessel after they followed what they had thought was a meteor. Until I got that globe, we didn’t know if I was an experiment from Russia, an alien, or what!”

Lois forced her mouth to stay closed, instantly recalling the image he had drawn on the notepad. The spaceship with his emblem.

“Time went on, and I discovered more abilities. Some were easier to control than others, but my parents helped me to learn, even though I know they were as scared as I was at times,” he said, pausing to rub a spot above his right eyebrow.

Lois wondered if his headache was getting worse.

“Do you need to stop for a moment?” she asked.

“No, I can keep going, and talking is a nice distraction from it,” he said, putting his hand back down. “Besides, I want you to know.”

She nodded, torn between the growing excitement of learning about his life and concern about his obvious growing headache. Was he really okay? Superman having a headache just sounded wrong.

“I went to high school, even joined the football team. But I was always very careful to hide my abilities because my parents were afraid the government would take me away and find a way to dissect me like a frog if I was discovered. And since becoming Superman, that fear has admittedly become stronger in some ways. Especially with my dad,” he said, before grimacing and rubbing his forehead again.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” she asked, now really growing concerned.

He looked to be in some serious pain now. He was squinting and frowning.

“I don’t know. It’s never hurt like this before,” he said after a moment, now looking uncertain.

That scared her.

“Could it be a migraine?” she asked.

“I don’t know. Doesn’t really match the descriptions of migraines I’ve heard. It’s just a bad headache. Feels hot,” he said, shaking his head.

“I’ll get you a cold cloth, maybe that’ll help,” she said.

“Thanks,” he said as she stood up. “Anyway, after high school, I — ”

He froze as he felt something drip from his nose just before it splattered loudly onto the surface of the table.

They both looked down.

A bold red drop of blood.

Part 8: Crystal

“Oh my G-d!” Lois shouted as several other bright red drops immediately followed.

She grabbed several tissues from her tissue box that was thankfully on the table and rushed to his side.

“Here, tilt your head back and pinch the bridge of your nose,” she said hurriedly, helping him stem the flow of blood now pouring from his nose. “Stay seated. Breathe through your mouth.”

He did as she said, tightly closing his eyes for a long moment as she swapped tissue after tissue until it finally began to slow.

“Okay, it’s slowing down. How are you doing?” she asked, trying to stay calm despite the blood on his face and on her hands.

“Et meshif cah.” He frowned, frustrated. “Het umalik!”

“Okay, okay, just hold it there,” she said, getting another tissue and taking a deep breath.

She would not let herself freak out! She could do that later, she decided.

He closed his eyes, wincing in pain.

“Let’s get back to the living room and lay you down,” she said.

He shook his head no, suddenly lowering his left hand and fiddling with the edge of his cape.

“Grumali tah,” he said, somehow removing a card from a pocket that she didn’t know existed. He handed it to her.

She quickly took it and read the name ‘Dr. Bernard Klein’ on the front with his office contact information. She then noticed indentations that told her something was written on the back, so she flipped it over. She found a handwritten telephone number and an address.

“Atlia,” he said, pointing to the written number.

She understood what he wanted and rushed to her phone.

She bit her lip as she dialed, spotting the time. 4:22 a.m.

The phone began to ring, and she looked back at him worriedly. He was still sitting at the table, holding a tissue to his nose as he kept his head back. His eyes were closed.

“He-Hello?” a voice answered.

“Yes?! Dr. Klein?” she asked, relieved.

“Yes? Who is this?” he asked, very drowsy.

“Lois Lane. Look, Superman is with me, and he needs some help. He gave me your card and wanted me to call you,” she said quickly.

“What?!” he asked, and by the ruffling sound she heard, she knew he was now sitting straight up in his bed.

“I’m not sure how much you know about what’s been happening, but he gave me your card, so you must know something, and I hope you can help. Can you come to my apartment right now?” she asked, not sure how much she could or should really say over the phone, but she wanted him to know this was serious and wasn’t a prank.

“What’s happening?” he asked amid background noise. It sounded like he was getting dressed, or at least she hoped so.

“Superman, how much can I say?” she asked.

Superman waved at her, and by the look in his eyes, she instantly knew to not hold back.

“His nose is bleeding, and he’s in a lot of pain. He’s talking Kryptonian right now and has remembered many things he didn’t know before. Does that help?” she asked.

“Yes, it does actually. Where are you?” he asked.

She quickly gave him her address.

"I'll be there as fast as I can!" he said, and then he hung up.

She put the phone down and hurried back to Superman. "Kal-El?" she asked.

He opened his eyes and looked at her, tentatively removing the tissue. The bleeding had stopped.

"Let's move you to my bed. Dr. Klein is on his way," she stated.

"Your bed?" he asked, squinting tightly at her.

She wasn't sure if he was squinting in pain or in confusion. It was likely both. However, she couldn't help but sigh in relief at hearing him speak English again.

"It'll be easier for Dr. Klein to help you there, and I think you should lay down," she explained.

"Okay." He slowly stood up, a grimace now perpetually on his face and a sheen of sweat on his brow. She had never seen him sweat before.

Pushing her fear of what was happening down, she moved to his side in case he needed help.

They made it out of the kitchen, but then he slowed and braced his hand against the wall.

"Lois," he said.

"Yes?" she asked nervously.

"Don't freak out, but I think I'm passing out," he stated, oddly detached.

"Lay down!" she ordered, immediately trying to guide him to do so.

He moved down to the floor, taking slow, deep breaths as he got down on his hands and knees.

"Come on, if you're passing out, you need your heart at the same level as your head," she said, recalling one of the few things she could remember from her dad's medical ramblings.

"I can't see," he stated, lowering himself further until he was lying flat on his stomach.

She could see his eyes, but his gaze was unfocused, exhausted.

"Just focus on breathing. Slow, deep breaths," she said, rubbing his back as he turned his head and let his cheek rest against the rug.

"Vision is coming back," he said quietly.

"Good. Now, do you think you can turn over, onto your side or back?" she asked. "It should help make breathing easier."

Superman did so with a moan, blinking up at her once he had fully turned.

"I'm going to get a pillow and a stool. I'll be right back," she said before hurrying to her room.

She returned less than a minute later and carefully put the pillow under his head before lifting up his socked feet and placing them on the padded stool to elevate his legs. His boots were still by the cot.

He helped her a little, but the effort it took made it clear there was no way he would be able to walk to her room or even to the couch, with or without her help.

"I'm going to get a wet washcloth," she said, leaving quickly before returning a moment later.

She wiped his forehead with it and then either side of his neck before laying it across his forehead.

He hummed his thanks.

"We'll just stay here for a moment," she said, sitting on the floor beside him.

That moment turned into over half an hour, and Lois was now certain Dr. Klein had gotten lost. Where was he?! Should she call an ambulance? Call Clark?

Superman was in pain on the floor of her apartment, and the man he had trusted enough to call in his time of need had yet to arrive!

"How is your headache?" she asked for the third or fourth time.

"Worse. It's actually worse," he managed, fighting back a groan. "Worse than the one I had while in that kryptonite cage."

"Kryptonite cage?!" Lois gasped. "What?!"

"Oh yeah. You don't know about that." He sounded bemused.

She was about to ask for more information when someone finally knocked on her door.

She rushed up, unlocking her door in record time.

"Dr. Klein?" she asked, throwing the door open.

The man was wearing a leather biker's jacket and was balding, but the suitcase in his hands caught her attention.

"Yes, I'm sorry I took lon —" He fell silent as he caught sight of Superman on the floor and quickly moved past Lois. "Superman, how are you feeling?"

Lois quickly closed and locked the door behind him.

"Been better," Superman said, covering his eyes with his forearm as the older man knelt beside him.

Dr. Klein opened up his suitcase and took out a stethoscope. Lois hovered on Superman's other side, taking note of the other medical things in Dr. Klein's bag before her eyes came to rest on a metal box.

"Is your headache getting worse?" Klein asked as he listened to the Kryptonian's heart and lungs.

"Much," Superman said through clenched teeth.

"Okay. I have an idea, but it might not work. I learned a lot about the purple kryptonite yesterday, and even though it no doubt caused this, I think it can also help," he said.

"What do you mean?" Lois asked.

"I don't think the purple kryptonite is actually kryptonite because, unlike red and green kryptonite, I don't think it was made when Krypton exploded. Its structure is too uniform, its radiation too, too organized. I think it's a pure form of Krypton that did not undergo the transformation that created the red and green kryptonite. And actually, I think it's a form of Kryptonian technology," Klein explained.

Lois' eyes widened as Superman shifted, trying to be attentive despite the pain.

"While that's fascinating, how does that help him?" Lois asked.

"I think the technology can impart knowledge into Kryptonian minds, and I think in this case it hadn't completed the process with Superman. Considering his symptoms, I think it's a fair guess to say that he got ... well, an incomplete download, I suppose you could say. Sort of like a computer that got a set of files but didn't completely get the software required to read them," he proposed. "So his mind is essentially full of data he can't properly read

and that's bogging everything down."

"So what do we do?" she asked.

"Well, we can either wait this out and see if he gets better, which I don't think is a good idea, or expose him to the purple crystal to finish the download," he said hesitantly.

Lois frowned and looked down at Superman who was still squinting up at them in growing pain.

"Let's try it," Superman said.

"Alright. I have it here," Klein said, picking up the lead box. "That's why it took me so long to get here. I made a stop at S.T.A.R. Labs first."

Lois took Superman's hand as Klein turned the box around.

"I'll close it if I don't think it's helping," Klein said.

Superman nodded, and then Klein slowly opened the box.

Purple light emanated from the box, coupled with the sound of gentle chimes. The pain quickly began to bleed away, and he let himself go limp under its brightening glow. The relief from the pain was stronger than the rejuvenating power of the sun on his skin, and he didn't attempt to stop his sigh of bliss.

Dimly, he heard Lois and Dr. Klein talking, but they sounded like whispers on the wind.

Images began to flash in his mind's eye, from schematics and diagrams to faces and landscapes. All the immense knowledge he might have received much sooner if he had grown up on Krypton. If fate had been different, for he was not only Kal-El.

He was Lord of the House of El.

If Krypton had not been destroyed, he would have been their Ruler. He would have ruled with Lady Zara.

And even now, if any Kryptonians still existed, his title would hold true.

But he was alone, given to Earth to live.

He opened his eyes, eliciting a gasp from both Dr. Klein and Lois as the crystal began to pulse more quickly. Unbeknownst to Superman, his eyes had flashed purple, balancing the knowledge in the form of energy that the crystal had given him.

After another minute, the pulsing slowed, and the process was complete.

"I take it it worked?" Dr. Klein asked.

"Yes. Thank you, doctor," he said, lowering his feet from the stool and slowly sitting up.

He smiled at Lois and squeezed her hand in silent thanks.

Lois beamed at him, looking as relieved as he felt.

"Could I have the crystal?" Superman asked softly.

"Of course!" Klein immediately said, holding the box out for him.

Superman gently picked the crystal up with his hand and wrapped his fingers around it.

"Do you still hear the chimes?" Dr. Klein asked.

"Yes, but they're much quieter," he said. "Thank you, Dr. Klein. You likely saved my life," he said genuinely.

Dr. Klein blushed but straightened in pride.

"I'm so glad I was able to help," he said, repacking his

briefcase. "Do you feel back to normal?"

"Yes, I think so. Physically anyway. Mentally, it's going to take me a bit to get used to knowing what I now know," Superman said, slowly standing up along with Klein and Lois.

"What did you learn?" Lois asked.

"A lot. My people's history, culture ... pretty much everything I've ever wondered about and then some. It's ... a lot," he said, barely keeping his voice from cracking with emotion.

"If there's anything I can do to help, please let me know. I'd love to learn about your people," Klein said.

"I think there is. I'll need help compiling the information, but later. Right now it's just too raw," Superman said.

Dr. Klein nodded understandingly before releasing a jaw-breaking yawn. "Oh, my apologies," he said, embarrassed.

"It's alright. I think we all could use some sleep now," Lois said, although she didn't look all that sleepy compared with Dr. Klein.

"Yes. As much as I wouldn't mind staying here to talk, I clearly should catch up on some sleep," he admitted.

Superman nodded as Klein made his way to the door.

"Thank you, Dr. Klein. While I wish we had met under better initial circumstances, I'm glad we've now met," Lois said, holding out her hand.

"I feel the same. And I love reading your and Mr. Kent's articles in the paper," he said, shaking her hand happily. He then opened the door, bid them a sleepy farewell, and quietly made his way down the hall.

Lois quietly closed the door and locked it again.

Part 9: Normal

She turned back to Superman, suddenly uncertain.

"Are you tired?" Superman asked.

"No, although I could use some coffee," she said, glancing down at his bootless feet.

For some reason, now that everything had calmed, her mind was suddenly struck by the sight.

Not merely because he didn't have the bright red boots on, but because his feet were covered in the most ordinary pair of socks imaginable. She wasn't sure what she had expected, but maybe something ... less normal?

He looked down and wiggled his toes, earning a laugh from her.

"It looks strange, huh?" he prompted. "I imagine no one would guess I wear typical white crew socks with my boots."

"No," she said with a chuckle.

"After coffee, why don't I take you to where I grew up?" he asked suddenly.

She startled, gaping at him. "Seriously?!"

"Has always been my plan, though I suppose I should tell you who I am first."

She looked at him thoughtfully, wondering why he looked so nervous. Did he think his identity would be so unnerving to her? Upsetting even? Was he afraid she would stop liking him once she knew who he was under the suit? Did he fear that she would find it too strange for him to be

whoever he was?

Sort of like the socks, was he a normal guy underneath?
And then she remembered the night she wished had never happened.

“Lois, I do care for you. But ... there are things about me you don’t know, that you may never know.”

*“It doesn’t matter. I know **you**. And I don’t mean you the celebrity or you the superhero. If you had **no** powers, if you were just an ordinary man leading an ordinary life, I would love you just the same. Can’t you believe that?”*

“I wish I could, Lois, but under the circumstances, I don’t see how I can.”

His response made a lot more sense now.

She refocused, identifying a flicker of an emotion she had never really seen on his face before.

Insecurity?

Why would he feel this way? Unless...

“I’ve already met you, haven’t I? I mean, I’ve already met the man you are outside the suit,” she stated.

He froze for a long moment before he slowly thawed.

He nodded mutely.

“I think I understand now. That’s why you’re so nervous. That’s why you didn’t tell me sooner.” She frowned to herself as she went to her couch and plopped down, trying to recall all the men she had ignored, been rude to, or said a flippant remark to so they would leave her alone.

She was now quite certain she had done that to Superman at some point. There wasn’t really a single man she hadn’t done some unkind thing to.

Lord. She really was an ice queen.

“You don’t think I’ll like the real you,” she said softly, her eyes sad.

“No! No, It’s... .” He scrambled for words but came up short as he sat on the other side of her couch.

“It’s okay, Superman. I know I can be ... well, pretty mean at times, especially to men. I’m just sorry I dished out some of it at you. I did, didn’t I?”

“Well, um, yes. But it was a while ago, and —”

“I really am horrible. I’m thinking back, trying to figure out who you could be by remembering all the people I’ve been rude to, and there’s too many!”

“Lois, it’s really not like you think,” he cut in, taking her hand.

She stilled and looked down at his hand holding hers.

Her hand that still had a bit of his blood on it.

She took a deep breath.

Maybe they should continue this later. They had been through a lot. But then, could she sleep knowing he wanted to tell her who he was but for some reason was finding it difficult? Maybe there was a better way to go about it.

“Telling me is hard for you, so maybe ... just ... let me figure it out?” she asked uncertainly, looking back up at him.

His eyebrows rose. “How?” he asked.

“Well, just continue where you had left off in the kitchen earlier, but leave out names or anything that you find too hard to share. I imagine by the time you’re done I’ll have figured it out,” she explained.

Superman looked thoughtful for a moment and then

hopeful.

She wished she knew why.

“Alright, I can do that,” he said.

“Good, but before you do, let me get dressed first,” she said, looking down at herself. She was still in her nightgown and slippers.

“If you’re sure you won’t be angry when you learn who I am, I could continue the story while we fly to where I grew up?” he proposed nervously.

Lois grinned. “I don’t know why you seem so concerned about my reaction. You could work in sewers and I wouldn’t care.”

“I’m going to hold you to that,” he said, though he didn’t look convinced.

“Fine by me,” she said before she disappeared back into her room.

Ten minutes later, she was back, dressed and freshened up.

“Ready?” she asked, finding him looking out the window.

“Yeah,” he said, holding out his hand.

She went to him, and in a blink, they were above the clouds.

“Okay, so after I graduated from high school, I went to college,” he began, flying at a slower pace than she was used to, but she wasn’t about to complain. “I kept to myself for the most part, but did partake in a few foreign exchanges, which got me into traveling. After I got my degree, I spent the next few years traveling the world. That’s when I picked up most of the languages I know now. However, as time went on, I wanted to settle some place, but that proved to be very difficult. Everywhere I went, things inevitably happened that I couldn’t ignore, and I would do something super that I couldn’t hide. And then I would have to move on because someone would become suspicious. I actually almost moved on from Metropolis after I had a close call just minutes after arriving. I’m glad I stuck around though.”

“What happened?” she asked.

“The brakes on a bus had gone out. I stopped it before it ran over people walking through the intersection on my way to my job interview. A woman saw me do it, and I barely got away before she brought attention to me. I had even left a hand imprint on the front of the bus. Sometimes I wonder about where she is now and why she hasn’t come forward, especially after Superman came out. I mean, I’m grateful that she hasn’t, but I do wonder.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah. Anyway, I went to the job interview and got denied right off the bat.”

“What! Really?” For some reason, that was hard to imagine. “They just told you no?!”

“Well, yeah. To them, I was just another guy wanting a job, competing with other guys also wanting a job. It also didn’t help that they technically didn’t have any job openings. And remember, when I was job hunting, Superman didn’t exist yet, but even if Superman did exist then, they still would have told me no. People don’t treat me like Superman when I’m me,” he said with a shrug.

“Isn’t that frustrating?” she asked. That would drive her

nuts.

“Not usually. When I’m ... just myself, not Superman, it’s a relief to be normal. To not be expected to be perfect or whatever. I can’t be Superman all the time. I think I would burn out, and then what good would I be?”

She nodded slowly, her mind churning his words.

“But you were eventually hired, right?” she asked as they glided over a cloud.

“Yeah. I proved myself by doing a job one of the other employees didn’t want to do.”

Lois laughed. “That’s what Clark did! That’s funny. He wrote an article I didn’t want to cover.”

Superman smiled. “Yeah, it was something like that.”

“So do you still have that job?” she asked curiously.

“Yeah, and it’s by far the best professional job I’ve ever had. No one knows I’m Superman, of course, and while I wouldn’t really mind some of them eventually finding out, if any of them got hurt because of some lunatic trying to get to Superman... ” He shook his head.

“Another reason why it’s hard for you to tell me,” she commented understandingly.

“Yeah,” he agreed softly.

“So how did Superman come about?” she asked.

“I actually have one of my coworkers to thank for that,” he said, his gaze turning away from her to focus on something in the distance as he continued flying. “Right after I returned from a quick rescue, I was filthy, and she commented that I should bring a spare set of clothes to work. That sparked the idea in my mind, but only after talking with my parents did it really take off. I spent hours with my mom trying to make a suit that would work. So much fabric!”

“So on the space shuttle, when you said your mother made it for you, you were serious,” she said, blinking.

“Of course. I try not to lie or exaggerate when I don’t have to. I have to lie often enough as it is,” he admitted with a frown.

“What do you mean?” she asked as they flew high over a bridge.

Where were they going?

“When I have to go and help someone, I can’t just tell my boss or coworkers that’s what I’m doing, for example. Fortunately, my job is fairly flexible, but things can still get pretty awkward or even frustrating.” He averted his eyes from her, and she was struck by how guilty he suddenly looked.

“Hm, yeah, I could see how that would be,” she said thoughtfully.

They were now flying over farmland. Farms and open fields as far as the eye could see.

“So about what you had said before, that kryptonite cage. What happened there? Was that before you became Superman? Was Bureau 39 involved?”

Superman startled slightly.

“Are you sure you want to know?” he asked, tensing up.

“I wouldn’t have asked otherwise,” she stated, inwardly frowning.

He sighed and grimaced before answering.

“It was Luthor. The day before the wedding. He wanted to talk to me, and after I refused to go to the wedding, he

sprung the trap. I managed to escape, but I was too weak to save him when, well... ”

“Oh.” She didn’t know what to say, but she wasn’t going to apologize for asking. And she definitely wasn’t going to ask why he hadn’t told her. The reason was obvious.

She stilled, reviewing everything he had told her. Was she still expected to figure out who he was from what he had told her? She didn’t even know what he did for a living. But then ... maybe that in itself was a clue. She had told him not to share anything that was too hard for him to share.

She frowned, and she didn’t have to look at him to know he was watching her. She could feel his growing unease from how he was holding her.

So she must have enough information to figure out his identity.

She forced herself to think, which was odd. It was almost as if a part of her didn’t want to know. Or already knew and didn’t want to admit it.

His work. He didn’t identify his work because it must be an instant give away.

He hadn’t identified his degree for the same reason.

And then it clicked.

Suddenly his fear of her reaction made absolute sense, and only her desire to prove him wrong stayed her temper.

She closed her eyes and tightened her hold on him, recalling how circumvent he had been about the globe as Clark. How Superman didn’t seem to mind what Clark had done with it. It made so much sense now!

Her thoughts fell back further, remembering how nervous he had been when Trask had first appeared and how he had reacted to the public’s enthusiastic response to Superman.

And then when they had gone to Smallville to investigate the meteorite. His ‘allergies’ and his paper cut. No wonder he hadn’t known what to do and had looked so baffled!

He had never been sick before! He had never been hurt!

Clark was Superman!

Her best friend, her partner, was the world’s most beloved hero.

The man who she had comforted as he relived his worst memory was Clark.

The man who had stopped Nightfall was the man who couldn’t beat Perry in a fair game of poker if his life depended on it.

The man she had at first written off as a ‘hack from nowhere’ was the Last Son of Krypton.

The man who corrected her spelling and brought her the perfect cup of coffee each morning was the most powerful man on the face of the planet.

She slowly exhaled.

“So, how far are we from Smallville?” she asked calmly.

He instantly stopped, hovering high above the clouds as he looked at her.

“You’re ... not mad?” he asked.

“Why would I be mad? It would just prove you were right to be nervous. Besides, I think you’ve beaten yourself up enough.”

He began flying them forward again, hesitantly.

“Really?” he asked.

“Everything makes a lot more sense. Honestly, the only anger I’m really feeling is at myself for not realizing it sooner,” she admitted.

“So . . . what now?” he asked.

“You wanted to show me where you grew up, so show me,” she said. “And then after, we still have that exclusive to do. After all, we need to decide what to tell the world where recent events are concerned.”

Clark smiled at her. “Okay.”

Part 10: Legacy

Clark landed with Lois on the back porch and opened the door.

“Mom, Dad?” he called.

He already knew they were awake and in the house, as he could hear their heartbeats.

“Oh, Clark, when you didn’t come home, we were worried!” his mother said, rushing out and embracing him.

“Sorry I didn’t call, Mom. A lot of stuff happened,” he said apologetically. “But everything is good now. Better than good.”

“Thank goodness. So what happened? And you’re sure you’re alright now?” she asked, pulling back.

“Yeah. Dr. Klein and Lois, as well as Perry, helped me,” he assured. “And we learned it wasn’t actually kryptonite, but Kryptonian technology.” He held it out to her, causing her to gasp. “Sort of like the globe, it took time for it to fully activate, and for me to absorb. It showed me my people’s history, their culture, accomplishments, everything. . . .” He exhaled shakily. “I’m certain my parents had left it for me to use, but somehow it fell from my spaceship. I bet it was in the area where you had found me.”

Martha hugged him again as Jonathan joined them.

“So glad to hear everything is okay now, son,” he said, clapping Clark on the shoulder before freezing.

He had noticed Lois.

“Uh, hi,” Lois said with a weak wave.

“Lois?” Martha asked, looking at her before turning back to Clark, who was still in his Superman uniform. Her eyebrows rose, her expression hopeful as she silently asked for an explanation.

“Oh! Uh, I sort of told Lois, or rather gave her enough clues to figure it out,” he said with a weak laugh.

“Oh! I’m so glad you finally know!” Martha exclaimed happily. “I’ve been praying for this day for a while!”

Clark blushed.

“So have you two had breakfast?” Jonathan asked, also grinning. “I imagine you haven’t because it’s so early.”

“Uh, no, we haven’t,” Lois said, slowly relaxing.

She hadn’t really thought about how the Kents would feel about her joining in on their secret, but she was relieved they seemed to be happy. Thrilled really.

“Then let me get started with making you two a hearty farmer’s breakfast. We have a lot to talk about!” Martha said, hurrying back inside.

Bemused, Lois looked at Clark, who shrugged helplessly before leading her inside behind his dad.

The following hours were the best hours Lois could

remember ever having with the family of a friend. She had never felt more welcomed and embraced. Even compared with the first time she had been in Smallville, which had been good, this was better. It also helped that she hadn’t embarrassed herself like before.

Martha told her story after story about Clark’s childhood, and she thoroughly enjoyed his embarrassment. It was adorable.

After lunch, Clark showed her around Smallville and ended at the place he called his Fortress of Solitude – an old tree house full of childhood toys with a sign written by a child’s hand. It was endearing and poignant, displaying both the innocence of his childhood and the loneliness he had endured.

And then, within his Fortress he showed her the globe, playing all five messages that it held and sharing everything he knew about himself with her.

No more secrets.

The exclusive that came out in the following week’s edition of the *Daily Planet* was no doubt the most newsworthy article of the year, perhaps decade. Within was the most in-depth interview Superman had ever given, answering questions concerning his people’s culture and unfortunate demise and covering his request to the world to remember the Kryptonian people and to learn from their mistakes.

Overnight, universities around the world were clamoring for heritage packages being put together by the Superman Foundation. Fortunately, through Perry’s contacts, the packages were produced and delivered efficiently and swiftly.

Each contained the necessary material to learn Kryptonian language, history, math, and culture, along with copied descriptions and drawings of Krypton’s lost fauna and flora, all handwritten and drawn by Superman himself.

The lifelike drawings and artistic flare of the Kryptonian script intermingled with English scrawl were tantalizing. Unsurprisingly, these heritage packages enthused humanity beyond anything else in recent history, giving them something tangible to grasp and something personal to relate to as they dove into the rich knowledge provided to them by the Last Son of Krypton.

S.T.A.R. Labs, led by Dr. Bernard Klein, began an intense study of the purple crystal, ultimately discovering a way to replicate it and use it both as a teaching device for humans and as a power source.

The world was beside itself, sparking an awakening comparable to the Renaissance. Some historians would even identify this event as the beginning of the Fifth Industrial Revolution, introducing the power of crystals and harmonious power cycles, coupled with easy knowledge storage and transfer. With such an abundance of free energy and avenue of new, expanding ideas, the planet was also allowed to heal itself from the effects of pollution.

In time, coupled with the encouraging example set before them by the Man of Steel and the unparalleled desire to ensure Earth would forever echo his legacy, mankind and his offspring rose, becoming a beacon of hope and power in the galaxy.

And it was all triggered by the sound of chimes and the pulse of a single crystal of purple.

THE END